



CONNECTICUT  
LEGAL  
RIGHTS  
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING  
FEBRUARY 16, 2022

**Concerns regarding HB 5037**, AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023, with specific focus on the **DOH** budget

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

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Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order that mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community. For the last several years, I have been a member of the Reaching Home campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut; I currently serve as the Keep the Promise Coalition representative to the Reaching Home Coordinating Committee. I submit these comments today based on nearly twenty-five years as a legal aid lawyer in Connecticut and my experience as a member of Reaching Home.

The Reaching Home campaign has several shared priorities, and I urge the members of this committee to consider allocating funds to support the following:

Preservation of the following DOH FY23 allocations:

- \$2.935 million Homeless Youth line

- \$85.323 million Housing/Homeless Services line
- \$637K Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
- \$100 million bond authorization for the Affordable Housing FLEX Fund and \$50 million bond authorization for the state Housing Trust Fund

We support a request for an increase in funding of \$20 million/year for the Rental Assistance Program to provide for additional tenant-based certificates for very low-income households. The waiting list for these certificates has been closed to new applicants for a long time; whenever the list has opened, thousands of families have applied for help. These certificates provide for housing mobility and opportunity.

We support a call for the expansion and funding for the Security Deposit Guaranty Program (SDGP). This program provides state security deposit guarantees for very low-income households who cannot afford a security deposit. It has been limited in recent years largely to helping homeless families leave emergency shelters. Not having money immediately available for a new security deposit is a barrier to many families trying to move.

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Before the pandemic, Connecticut had eviction prevention programs, such as the Rent Bank, as tool for negotiating settlements in eviction cases. The number of eviction cases filed per month is moving toward pre-pandemic levels. Now that UniteCT is no longer taking new applications, we need state funding to restore pre-pandemic eviction prevention programs and/or provide funding for a continuation of UniteCT.

The Right to Counsel program has started to provide legal assistance to tenants in several designated areas of the state. We can more effectively leverage the Right to Counsel legal services by coupling them with high-quality social work to address the various needs faced by vulnerable renters. We support an additional \$2.5 million in DOH's Housing Homeless Services line to establish and implement that eviction prevent model.

Maintaining the infrastructure of the homeless service system will be impossible if the state fails to make critical additional investments, including an additional \$2.3

million in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to provide needed support for 2-1-1 and the Coordinated Access Network. The work to prevent and end homelessness requires staff. Therefore, we support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long-term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations. We believe additional investments should be made via increases in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line, the DOH Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line, and the DOH Homeless Youth line in order to support increased wages, adequate benefits and professional development for front-line staff.

We appreciate the Governor's proposal to invest \$50 million of federal American Rescue Plan recovery funds to support the creation of 350 additional housing units affordable to households with incomes between 30% and 50% of area median income.

We can make sure that homelessness in Connecticut is rare, brief, and one-time. When CLRP represents clients in housing cases, in virtually every case, we are able to assist our clients in accessing or maintaining their housing. However, our legal services colleagues and we are not able to provide representation to everyone who seeks our help. We need to ensure that people who call upon the homeless services system for help are able to access that assistance timely. We need to invest in what we already know works: affordable housing, supportive services, and the people who are on the front lines.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.